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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 007098

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: IRANIAN FM MOTTAKI'S VISIT TO ANKARA

REF: ANKARA 7027

Classified By: POLCOUNS JANICE G. WEINER FOR REASONS 1.4 (b,d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki visited Ankara November 30 to December 1 and met President Sezer, PM Erdogan, FM Gul and key opposition party leaders. Press coverage was low-key and largely positive. Turkish leaders reportedly gave Mottaki a "clear message," warning that Iran's nuclear programs could be referred to the UN Security Council. FM Gul raised human rights with Mottaki and stressed that government accountability and human rights are important Islamic tenets. On the Middle East, Gul told Mottaki that supporting the Roadmap is the only way to an independent Palestinian state. Mottaki noted that Iranian Kurds were now in the PKK and promised continued Iranian cooperation on countering Kurdish extremism. The Turks found Mottaki "relaxed" on Iraq, unconcerned that Iraq might fragment. Bilateral trade and energy issues were also discussed. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Iranian FM Mottaki arrived in Ankara on November 30 for two full days of meetings with nearly everyone in the Turkish political elite. He saw President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Parliamentary Speaker Bulent Arinc, Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Gul, Turkish Chamber of Commerce President Refat Hisarciklioglu, Republican People's Party (CHP) Chairman and former Foreign Minister Deniz Baykal, former Prime Ministers Bulent Ecevit and Necmettin Erbakan, and former president Suleyman Demirel. The Iranian FM, per our MFA contacts, arranged most meetings on his own, thanks to contacts from his controversial time here as Iranian Ambassador in the late 1980s. MFA flatly denied that Mottaki had met with Chief of the Turkish General Staff General Ozkok.

Iraq, PKK, MEPP

¶3. (C) Charge d' Affairs and POLCOUNS received a readout on Mottaki's visit December 1 from the PM's foreign policy advisor Ahmet Davutoglu and MFA DG for Middle East Oguz Celikkol. Celikkol and Davutoglu said that Mottaki appeared relaxed when discussing Iraq. Celikkol and Davutoglu surmised that the Iranians no longer believe that the territorial integrity of Iraq (a key Turkish concern) is in danger. Gul reportedly told Mottaki that the Iranians have to support the Roadmap if they want an independent Palestinian state. Mottaki responded that they have "seen many roadmaps and plans," starting with Oslo, and none had arrived at the goal.

¶4. (C) Mottaki raised the PKK issue first, noting it had become their own domestic issue since there were now Iranian Kurds in the PKK. The Iranian proclaimed Tehran is ready to cooperate with Turkey against the PKK. Celikkol noted that the Iranians had recently acted cooperatively in this regard.

(Note: Turkish television has carried stories in recent months about Iranian military operations against the PKK in northwestern Iran. End Note.)

Nuclear and Human Rights Issues

¶5. (C) Mottaki told the Turks that Iran will re-start talks with the EU-3 in two weeks. The Turks claimed that PM Erdogan and FM Gul both delivered a "clear message" that if developments did not go in the right direction, the issue could be referred to the UN Security Council. Gul reportedly told the Iranian FM that Turkey is opposed to any countries in the region gaining nuclear weapons. Gul, according to Celikkol, stressed to Mottaki that the Turks know how serious the issue is because they sit in on NATO and EU meetings. Mottaki reportedly replied that referring the issue to the UNSC would be a "lose-lose" proposition -- for Iran and for the West.

¶6. (C) Celikkol said that Gul also raised human rights, noting that the Turks view violations in the entire region as their problem. Mottaki responded that they had to look at

violations in the West as well. Gul's rejoinder, Davutoglu said, was that it is necessary for countries here to look at and deal with their own shortcomings. Celikkol added that Gul had noted that administrations need to be accountable to their own people and that Turkey (and Iran) had not yet reached that point. Gul reportedly told Mottaki that respect for human rights is an important tenet of Islam.

Economic Issues

17. (C) Mottaki expressed a willingness to resume negotiations on the price of natural gas supplied to Turkey and discussed the transit of Iranian gas to Europe. MFA's energy DDG Mithat Rende said that Gul agreed to resume talks (there have been many unsuccessful rounds over the years), but only on the condition that there be a real give and take on the price issue (as opposed to the "maximalist" approach the Iranians have taken in the past). The MFA official was not optimistic that there had been a genuine change in the Iranian approach on these difficult subjects. The Turkish side also "asked," he said, that Iran buy more Turkish goods in order to redress the trade balance that is currently heavily weighted in Iran's favor, and resolve Turkcell and TAV disputes.

Positive, but Muted Press Coverage

18. (C) Press coverage was decidedly muted. Cumhuriyet covered the story on page 8, Radikal on page 12, Zaman on page 13, and Milliyet on page 20. Some Turkish papers completely ignored the story. NTV had a softball interview with Mottaki, but in general TV coverage of the event was light and positive.

19. (C) On this trip, Mottaki did not visit the mausoleum dedicated to Turkish Republic founder Mustafa Kemal Ataturk -- normally de rigeur for official visits. In addition, the contentious bilateral commercial issues were scarcely mentioned in the press.

110. (C) FM Mottaki had an interview with NTV, an independent news channel. He was relaxed and positive throughout the interview, which largely consisted of softball questions about issues of the day. Mottaki repeatedly claimed that Turkish and Iranian relations were very good and that they were cooperating to bring peace to the region. Mottaki also asserted that Iran does not have nuclear weapons, but "other states" in the region do. He said that Iran does not have any concerns regarding the territorial integrity of Iraq and the Iraqi people will make the necessary decisions regarding state structures (e.g. federalism).

Comment

111. (C) The Turks appear to have talked seriously to the Iranian FM. Still, Mottaki got virtually complete access -- he saw nearly everyone of substance in Ankara. The absence of critical press coverage was striking, given the controversy that could have surrounded Mottaki and current issues on the Turkey-Iran agenda -- the Turkish press appears to have gotten the word to spin the visit positively. (In the late 1980s, Mottaki was Iranian Ambassador to Turkey and left under a cloud in 1989 because of alleged interference in domestic Turkish politics and "subversive activities".) End Comment.
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